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ABSTRACT

In the new peer tutor training sessions at a northeastern university, a high level of interaction among the tutor trainer and trainees is one way the staff measures the success of the sessions. Within the limited time frame of 2 hours, however, the trainer must impart a great deal of information about the center and tutor position requirements. The conflict and tension of these two goals tend to be reflected and created through the discourse strategies employed by the participants in the tutor training sessions. This study looks closely at these interactional moves and shows how the strategies that work towards achieving the goal of interaction tend to be overshadowed by those that are more consistent with explicit instruction. Findings suggest that tutors may not be involved in the training sessions because of an overt asymmetrical social relationship between the trainer and the tutors, which tends to limiting of the tutors' participation in the training. By focusing on the training sessions for new tutors and the developed asymmetrical social relationships between the trainer and the tutors, this paper has illustrated the power of discourse interpersonal communication to perpetuate hierarchical social structures. (Contains 12 references.) (KFT)

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Participant Framework in Tutor Training

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In the new peer tutor training sessions at a northeastern university, a high level of interaction among the tutor trainer and trainees is one way the staff measures the success of the sessions. Within the limited time frame of two hours, however, the trainer must also impart a great deal of information about the center and tutor position requirements. The conflict and tension of these two goals tend to be reflected and created through the discourse strategies employed by the participants in the tutor training sessions. This study looks closely at these interactional moves and shows how the strategies that work towards achieving the goal of interaction tend to be overshadowed by those that are more consistent with explicit instruction.

ED 452 704

Introduction

Universities in the United States often offer students struggling in a subject the opportunity to work with a peer who has success fully completed the same course. Some universities limit their involvement in such peer tutoring programs by simply matching tutors with students, while other institutions, like the northeastern university in this study, are more active in preparing students to become private instructors. The purpose of this research is to examine the discourse strategies employed in the training sessions for undergraduate peer tutors and, in particular, to look closely at the effects these strategies are having on the tutor participation levels during the sessions. High levels of participation is a primary goal of the trainer. As the staff explained, it is important for the tutors to engage in discussions and ask questions during the training sessions because the job they are taking on is an interactive one. A second goal, and one that seems to be in conflict with the first, is to impart a great deal of information about the tutoring center and the responsibilities of a new tutor. Each of these goals calls for different, almost competing, discourse strategies. The findings of this study suggest that while interaction among the participants is a stated primary goal for the trainer, the strategies which he employs to encourage the tutors to interact and participate in discussions are often overridden by

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strategies that disengage them.

This research was developed in response to the explicit concerns of the tutoring center staff that the new tutors were not only minimally participating in the training sessions, but they were also not absorbing the information. In addition to working on interpersonal skills, the staff contended that the training sessions were opportunities for the staff to get feed back from the tutors. A lack of engagement on the part of the new tutors, the staff contends, may hinder the Center from achieving their educational and professional goals in holding these sessions.

In determining what linguistic factors might be affecting the involvement level of the tutors, two main areas are focused on in this study. First, the discourse strategies that the participants (the trainer and a number of tutors) employ in the peer tutor training sessions to express and manage their positions and status relationships in their interactions are identified. Second, the ways that these strategies influence the tutors' involvement in the conversations are explored in depth.

When the trainer employs a strategy, he is indicating the relationship he would like to have with the tutors as well as hinting to the tutors what kind of contributions they should make to the on-going discourse. The orchestration of these cues by the trainer (by means of the discourse strategies discussed here) tends to perpetuate asymmetrical social relationships among the participants. As will be shown, the cues offered by the trainer to engage the tutors in conversation are in conflict with at least one of the goals of the training sessions, explicit instruction. Specifically, the trainer opens the floor for discussion, but keeps tight control over the conversation and its outcomes. It is challenging at best for the tutors first to recognize the goal of the interaction from the cues and second to know how to participate. In the end, the form of the interaction may influence the level of effectiveness of the training sessions.

Theoretical Framework

Much of the work presented in this paper is grounded in the approach to discourse analysis referred to as interactional sociolinguistics. Based on the contributions of Gumperz (1982) and Goffman (1981), this approach encourages a close analysis of utterances as they reflect and create meaning within their context. In other words, this approach sees context not only as a place where language is situated but also as an entity that is socially created through language. The focus of this analysis of training sessions is on the means by which the speakers, particularly the trainer, manage their positions in the interactions and how the participants are made aware of and co-construct these positions. Throughout their negotiation of roles and positions in their interactions, the participants in this study are ultimately structuring and continuously restructuring the context of their talk. As maintained by both Gumperz and Goffman, this construction is far from random. Rather, it is a systematic process which is accomplished through the contributions of all participants in face-to-face interactions.

In order for there to be involvement in a conversation, the participants must

share linguistic and socio-cultural knowledge (Gumperz 1982). Individuals call on this knowledge to interpret what is going on in an interaction. Participants also rely on hints from others to inform them of how to react and pursue their communicative goal. Gumperz (1982) calls these hints contextualization cues and defines them as "surface features of message forms... by which speakers signal and listeners interpret what the activity is, how semantic content is to be understood and how each sentence relates to what precedes or follows" (1982:131). In other words, without recognizing where an utterance came from, where it's going, and how it fits into the interaction, it cannot really be understood (Gumperz, et. al. 1984 as summarized by Tannen 1989).

'Footing' is a concept used in looking at how participants are involved in particular social interactions (Goffman 1981). In shifting their footing during talk, speakers convey messages as to their position or stance towards the talk, their interlocutors, themselves, and so on. These shifts function as cues to the hearer as to the direction the talk is going and the shape it is taking.

Shifts in footing occur when a speaker alters their role(s) in an interaction (Goffman 1991). These may occur at any point including within a speaker's same turn. Shifts serve a variety of functions in interactions and are context dependent. In his study on news interviews, Clayman (1992) suggests that footing shifts work in that context to maintain neutrality. Schiffrin (1990), in her work on conflict talk, discusses changes in footing among interlocutors as a strategy for supporting an argument position. Specifically, she says that the shift moves the focus from a proposition's truth to the speaker's sincerity, making it more difficult for their opponent to challenge. Pomerantz (1984) uses examples of footing shifts to show ways individuals deal with performing sensitive actions.

Work on dispreferred responses has been useful in identifying status decreasing moves on the part of the trainer (Pomerantz 1984). Status decreasing moves, such as hedging and using inclusive pronouns, generally suggest to a speaker's interlocutors an interest in developing or creating rapport or co-membership. Interlocutors will avoid giving a response that would be counter to what is expected or the norm for a particular context. This avoidance of dispreferred response suggests the same interest in maintaining positive relations.

Works by Edelsky (1993) and Maynard (1991) also contribute greatly to this research and were valuable in identifying status increasing strategies. Status increasing strategies suggest to interlocutors an interest in creating social distance and, even more, a desire to assert authority, superiority, or power. In what began as a gender and language study, Edelsky presents the issue of floor. She discusses the importance of turn length and topic control, and examines how these affect the flow and outcome of the interaction. Maynard discusses asymmetry in professional discourse between the professional and their client. In perspective display series (PDS), a discourse pattern identified by Maynard, the professional controls the direction of talk by ignoring or minimally responding to the contributions of the other participant. All of these tools are instrumental to this analysis.

Methods

The tutoring center where this research took place offers a variety of academic support services to all enrolled undergraduate students. These services include assistance with learning strategies, individual peer tutoring, group tutoring, and a variety of other scheduled tutoring events. The peer tutors hired by the university are required to attend one two-hour "New Tutor Training" session before they begin meeting with students. Additional training sessions are held throughout the year.

The data for this study comes from three of these "New Tutor Training" sessions, which were led by the same trainer, John[1], but attended by different tutors. The sessions were all audio taped with the verbal consent of the participants. After the tapes were made, the corpus of data for this project was limited to nine individual conversations from the sessions. All of these conversations occurred after the groups watched video skits of meetings between tutors and students. These discussions were also selected as the focus of the study because, according to the trainer, these were the most interactive parts of the training sessions.

In addition to the audio recording, a number of qualitative methods were employed both during the sessions and after. I attended all of the trainings and took field notes. Though I was occasionally addressed in the sessions by the trainer, my participation was kept to a minimum in an effort to avoid influencing the interactions. I also conducted an interview with the trainer, John, after the tape recordings were made. John was asked about the sessions and his impressions of the interactions and participation of the tutors in the conversations mentioned above. This interview was extremely informative and offered an additional perspective of the interactional patterns as well as an understanding of how at least this participant is framing himself in the sessions. It was also crucial in the study because at the end of the interview, after recording his perspectives of the tutoring sessions, I presented and received feedback on my preliminary findings.

Data Analysis

Status decreasing strategies

The first set of strategies are those the trainer uses seemingly in attempt to reduce status differences in the interactions. These may be considered involvement cues for the tutors. By placing himself at a more equal status with the tutors, the trainer encourages them to be more involved in interaction. These status decreasing strategies include footing shifts (Goffman 1981) and the mitigation of dispreferred responses (Pomerantz 1984). When the trainer, John, shifts footing, he distances himself from the advice or requests he is offering to the group. In other words, he places the responsibility for the thoughts and or words he is expressing on other parties and positions himself more as an equal or peer of the

[1] All names used in this paper are pseudonyms.

tutors. Mitigation of dispreferred responses occurs when there is disagreement in the conversation. John employs various strategies in initiating dispreferred responses, again, seemingly to keep status differences minimal.

Shifts in footing

There are various roles that speakers and hearers play in talk (Goffman 1981). In the production of talk, there are the roles of animator, author, principal, and figure. The animator is the one who produces the utterance. The author is the one who originated the words or beliefs. The principal is the one whose beliefs or position is being expressed. The figure is the person whom the talk is about. A vivid example which I find useful in illustrating how these roles may be played out is a courtroom. The animator is the assistant defense attorney who is talking for the principal, or the defendant, and is reading the words of the author, the defense attorney who wrote the defense but was unable to be in court, and the figure is the other possible perpetrator talked about in the defense argument to cast doubt on the guilt of the defendant.

In the data used for this study, John frequently shifts away from principal. In other words, he places responsibility for a thought or suggestion on a non-present other. In the majority of the cases, the change of footing appears to be an effort to reduce status difference. In other words, through pronoun use, the naming of others, and hypothetical and real quotes, John reduces his status from a position of expert, or one who has information the others need, to one who is on the same status level (and on the same side) as the tutors.

The following is an example of a footing change. It occurs when John names another as responsible for what he is expressing. In the excerpt, he claims that it is the video that is encouraging students to work together. Underlining in all excerpts are the highlights for analysis. See Appendix A for transcription conventions.

(1)
a. John: u:m and (.) in fact one of the things the points the video tries to make is
b. also having these people do homework together outside of the class outside of the
c. tutoring session and it can kind of help

In line (a), John points to the video as the principal. He offers his opinion of the suggestion in (c), but does so in a rather mitigated way with "kind of." It is possible that either John recognizes the weightiness of the suggestion and does not want to be held responsible for making it, or he wants to reduce his status as the authority at that moment. In either case, the shift works to reduce his affiliation with the idea.

Another shift away from principal is through paraphrasing or predicting what the others in the group are thinking. Within his turns, John will offer a hypothetical quote, or something that the tutors might say in a particular situation (as opposed to something that a tutor has actually said). This seems to function in different ways depending on the place it occurs in the interaction. For the most part, it seems to be used as a solidarity building mechanism where he is showing the tutors that

he understands what they are going through. At times, though, it seems to function as a way of reestablishing expert status. This latter function will be explored in greater detail in a later section.

In the next excerpt, John is vocalizing criticism of one of the skits in the video. In the skit, the tutor encourages the students to work on their own. John uses the ideas of other tutors who have seen the video to both place responsibility for the negative assessment on others and to offer support for his assertion that tutors should be very involved in their student's learning.

(2)
a. John: and some people'll complain and have said you know (.) actually it really
b. looks like the tutor's it's a great scam for the tutor the tutor's making their
c. money and they're telling these guys to go study together and I'll meet
d. with you and so and and a couple of people have said why do they even
e. have a tutor because the the level of involvement the tutor had and wanted
f. them to study by themselves based upon what the tutor did so just another
g. example of how (.) ya know it's important that (.) uh tutors are involved

In (a-d) and (d-e) John explicitly states that he is relaying someone else's message. Initially it may seem that in (a-d) and (e) John is also shifting away from the role of author as well as principal. In actuality, however, he is not. The quotes are paraphrases rather than direct. Thus, they are his words, but not his ideas. In (e-f) he rationalizes their opinions, but does not advocate for their positions himself. In (g) he then justifies making the utterances, but still refrains from making a strong commitment to the expressions in (a-d) and (d-e).

In an interview, John said that he does some things such as talk about his interest in baseball and have everyone introduce themselves in the beginning to try to make the atmosphere informal. Later in that interview, John and I discussed some of the strategies presented above. He agreed with the suggestion that he shifts principal to both separate himself from some of the information he is presenting (lines b and e) and to show more camaraderie with the tutors.

(3)
a. John: you know (.) I am very aware of the I and we thing you know? 'cause a lot
b. of time I don't want to be associated with some of the stuff (.) you know
c. they tell me in the office you have to talk about time sheet they're not
d. doing their time sheets right' and stuff and like the a lot some of the things
e. are just crap you know? and I don't want to be held responsible

In sum, John employs some shifting strategies to work towards a status equal interaction. He will, for example, attribute an idea to another and/or include quotes to shift away from the principal role and place responsibility for the contribution elsewhere. John's changes in footing most often function to reduce his commitment to the advice or opinions given in the discussions and thus suggest a more symmetrical relationship with the tutors. His distancing seems to be a cue that he wishes to identify more with those attending the session and, perhaps, engage in more peer talk.

Dispreferred responses

In her study of preferred and dispreferred responses to statements of assessment, Pomerantz (1984) asserts that a speaker will construct their turn differently according to whether they are responding in the way the previous speaker would favor or not. When a speaker agrees and an agreement is the preferred response they may offer the same evaluation, an upgrade, or a downgrade. For example, if two people are looking at a painting and one says that they like the painting, the second can either say that they also like the painting (same evaluation), that they not only like the painting, but think that it is the most beautiful painting in the world (upgrade), or that they think it is just not bad (downgrade). When a speaker disagrees and an agreement is the preferred response, they may delay a response and/or agree and then disagree within the same turn. Avoiding dispreferred responses tends to function to decrease status differences among interlocutors. Most often, in the context of the training sessions, positive feedback, agreement, is considered to be the preferred response to a given statement, and disagreement is the dispreferred.

The following excerpt is an example of a short filler, or an utterance in speech that contains no propositional content (e.g. um, er, uh). In this interaction, John. who was asking what the tutors would do once they got their e-mailed assignment, was looking for the answer given by Matt in line (h), not the one give by Adam in line (d).

(4)
a. John: what do you think you would do (.) um (.) when you receive this e-mail (.)
b. other than calling the tutee what what would you do with this message
c. itself
d. Adam: reply same thing
e. John: u:h (.) no I wouldn't reply actually because you're replying actually to our
f. office
g. and it's just we're not gonna you know just send them something back
h .Matt: print it
i. John: print it out (.) print this thing out keep a hard copy of it (.) that's a good
j. idea

In line (e-f), Jim precedes his disagreement with Adam's statement in line (d), a dispreferred response, with the filler 'uh.' This delay suggests that John is more or less reluctant to disagree and he continues in his turn with an explanation for his disagreement. This status decreasing move seems to be countered, however, in his next turn. In his response to the preferred response, John repeats Matt's words and evaluates the answer as "a good idea." (line h-i) In this context, based on the observation that John has elicited the same response in all his tutoring sessions, this positive feedback may be considered a status increasing move. In other words, John is not gaining any new information; rather, he is praising a tutor for giving an answer he already knew.

Another strategy used is to agree before disagreeing with the previous position (Pomerantz 1984). In such agreement-plus-disagreement turns, the disagreements

themselves are not very strong. This was often the case in the tutor training sessions. In excerpt 5, the trainer first validates the tutor's contributions by aligning them with others who have agreed with or previously made the same statement. By strategically separating himself from those who agree with the statement, the trainer sets up the opportunity to contradict.

(5)
a. John: remember? (..) what time they were going to get together on Sunday
b. evening?
c. Jane: seven
d. John: we:ll (.) actually that's what you would assume /she said/ (.) but actually
e. she said sevenish

After expressing understanding of why Jane answered the way she did (line d), John disagrees with a statement that detaches himself personally from the dispreferred response. In other words, he places blame for the disagreement some place else (line e). He suggests that her answer is one that would generally be agreed upon, then gives a quote from the tape. By avoiding a direct criticism or negative evaluation of Jane's response, John manages a more status equal position between himself and the tutor.

The following, segment 6, is another example of the agreement-plus-disagreement strategy in which John strongly agrees with Sarah's contribution (line c) then partially disagrees (line d). In this segment, the trainees were asked to identify from a numbered list what kind of strategies the tutor in the video employed in the segment.

(6)
a. Sarah: okay (.) four?
b. John: number four (.) having the tutee explain it to the tutor kind of what we call
c. talk about the Socratic method (.) definitely and in fact (.) a lot of people
d. say we:ll actually you know it's kind of question two (.) too

When asked about how he handles a comment he does not agree with, John said he avoids directly rejecting the contribution. In the interview he suggested that tutors would be "put off" if he did (line f). Since he wants to keep them engaged (lines f-g) and in alignment (line j) with what he is presenting, he does not want to say they are wrong.

(7)
a. John: yeah it's funny (.) even when people'll say things wrong I don't say that's
b. wrong
c. Tam.: why
d. John: I'm very aware that I don't (..) I don't like to tell them that they're wrong
e. I don't want to put them off you know? and I don't I don't want them to
f. kind of get turned off to what's going on by having what they said just
g. kind of dismissed so what I'll try to do is try to have them look ya know?
h. (.) like I'll kind of say well ya know that's a good idea bu:t ya know and
i. I'll try to get them on the right track

In sum, in the peer tutor training sessions, the trainer uses a variety of strategies in expressing dispreferred responses (i.e., disagreement) to some tutors' contributions. In the examples above, he uses fillers, places responsibility for the disagreement on another, and uses agreement-then-disagreement patterns. All of these strategies seem to be functioning to reduce status differences between the trainer, John, and the tutors attending the session. As he says in his quote above, he wants to keep the tutors involved, so he avoids certain status increasing moves such as ignoring or negatively evaluating an individual.

While there are a number of strategies being employed by the trainer to create or perpetuate a sense of equality in the sessions, there continues to be complaints at the tutoring center that the tutors are not engaged in the discussions. This may be the result of the use of status increasing strategies.

Status increasing strategies

Certain discourse strategies in ordinary conversation may be considered to be status increasing primarily based on the high value placed, by the participants, on those strategies (Watts 1992). These include introducing an accepted topic, giving information others do not have, getting affective responses, getting others to carry out an action, holding audiences' attention for narratives or longer turns, and controlling access to the floor (Edelsky 1993). Almost all of these are employed in the tutor training sessions. These status increasing and sustaining strategies used in the sessions seem to have a substantial effect on the interaction levels of the tutors. In what is perceived by John to be a very informal interactive discussion, there is actually rather limited engagement.

Control of floor

In the tutor training session, there is a noticeable asymmetry between the frequency and length of John's turns and the tutors' turns in the interactions. Not only does John speak more often, he also speaks for much longer periods of time. This move both creates and sustains him in a higher status position in the interactions. Another status increasing move is that, particularly in the discussions following the video skits, John initiates all the topics of conversation. In terms of engaging tutors in the interactions, when asked how he does it, John said that he asks provoking and often rhetorical questions and frequently calls on people he senses have something to say. In such situations, he clearly has control of access to the floor. He determines not only who can speak, but also who will speak.

The following is an example of both how John works to continue on a topic he initiated and how he controls access to the floor. This piece comes from the middle of a conversation about the second video skit shown in the sessions.

(8)
a. John: so a good thing one good thing she did was she was helping them think
b. about the future a little bit (..) and actually that is one thing we tell you get

c. a syllabus for the course so you have an idea where it's heading a lot of
d. them are on line now so you can go to the web site Jodi you've been
e. relatively silent about this tell me something bad or good you saw in the
f. video
g. Jodi: um she should have tried to organize it mo:re

In lines (d-e) John identifies Jodi as someone who has not yet taken a turn in the conversation. After making this identification, he directs the general question he has been asking the group to her (line e-f). This time, however, the request for feedback is in the form of an imperative.

Jodi's compliance to participate in the discussion about the video clip suggests a collaborative move to sustain the asymmetrical relationship. In addition, the lack of interruptions when John takes rather lengthy turns and the tutor's general affective responses to John's contributions also support the notion of collaboration in creating the unequal status situation. It is possible that in this situation, the tutors offer affective responses whether they agree or not because John is considered a gatekeeper for their employment (Freidson 1970). Interview data from the tutors would be needed to explore this further.

Perspective Display Series

In professional settings, particularly that of the medical interview, in addition to the status increasing strategies used in every day conversation, there are often additional strategies employed to sustain asymmetrical social structures between the professional and the lay person (Maynard 1991). The pattern in which these strategies are used is the same one often used in everyday conversation to build solidarity. In other words, it is an involvement strategy in everyday talk. The pattern is referred to as perspective display series (PDS). In a PDS, a speaker solicits another speaker's opinion or position on a topic then reports or assesses the same topic in a way that takes the other speaker's response into account.

In everyday conversation, the initial invitation in the PDS is often considered a presequence (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974) or cautious way of proposing a topic. This invitation (both in everyday conversation and medical interviews) is either marked or unmarked. The marked invitations offer a hint and/or presume knowledge of what the response is going to be (Watts 1992). The question might be, for example, in the form of a tag question where agreement with the statement is often presumed. The unmarked does not make any such presumptions. In everyday conversations, if the respondent does not agree with the speaker, or they do not give the preferred response, the speaker will usually alter their next turn to maintain alignment. Maynard (1991) argues that in medical interviews, no such alteration is made. In other words, the patient's response has little consequence on the direction of the conversation. The result of this is that the physician guarantees that the conversation will end with the diagnosis or point they intend to make.

The participants in the tutor training sessions tend to employ strategies similar to those of the medical interview. Specifically, much of the asymmetry in the interactions can be attributed to PDS style interactions where the trainer main-

tains control of the topic and determines the overall outcome. There are a few strategies by which this is accomplished. These include reformation of a tutor's turn into jargon, giving little feedback on dispreferred responses, and taking turns unfazed by surrounding talk. In the end, John's agenda for the interaction is achieved, and, as in the medical interviews, these strategies work to reinforce the visibility of the trainer's own expertise (Maynard 1991:477).

The following segment is one of only a few examples of reformulation by the trainer. According to John, the area of tutoring really has few "buzz words." It is therefore not common for him to reformulate the tutors' responses. In this excerpt, Kara is responding to John's request for comments on a video clip. After Kara's response, John reformulates the idea into slightly more professional terms, "think about the future" (line d).

(9)
a. Kara: I think it was good that at least she had a syllabus and she was keeping
b. track of /?/ she was organized in that way
c. John: okay (.) so a good thing one good thing she did was she was helping
d.think about the future a little bit

The more common strategies used to sustain status are those used by John to control the topic and outcome of the interactions. When initiating a discussion, John will either offer a marked invitation or an unmarked invitation to the others to speak. In the following example, John is working to keep the interactions going.

(10)
a. John: um other thoughts about good things or bad things about what was
b. going on specifically anything? what did the tutor do? (.) I I guess you all
c. you think this tutor did a good job?

He first offers an unmarked invitation for the tutors' positive and negative opinions about the video (lines a-b). Before anyone responds, however, he tables, or puts forward, a marked invitation which presumes that the tutors have a negative evaluation (end of line b-c).

When asked about the interactive nature of the sessions, John explained that he intends for there to be discussion (lines a-b, h-i), but within some boundaries (lines d, f, g-h,j, k).

(11)
a. John: this is a job that's going to be interactive so I want them to start getting
b. use to being interactive early on
c. Tam.: mm-hmm so you want it to be very interactive?
d. John: yeah I mean, as much as possible within the realm of my guidance
e. Tam.: what do you mean (laugh) by that?
f. John: well (.) you know like I can't I just can't say talk amongst yourselves

[2] Vaklempt is a Yiddish word meaning to become extremely emotional. John's use here, as well as his utterance in line(i) "talk among yourselves" is a refereence to a parody skit on the television show Saturday Night Live.

g. don't get vaklempt[2]/?/ no (.) but like I I don't want to just say just talk
i. take and I wanna ya know have them talking but also want to keep it
j. there's (.) I can only I mean it's already a two and a half hour session and
k. I don't want it run on I have (.) so I have to keep control of it

Arguably, the asymmetrical relationship created through the partiality of the trainer to status increasing strategies discourages involvement. The trainees not only have little say or influence on the direction of the conversation, but also are often not clearly cued as to how they are expected to participate.

Sample Discourse

In this section, the research on status increasing and status decreasing discourse strategies are pulled together and used as a framework to analyze a sample piece of discourse from one of the tutoring sessions. The intent is to look at how the different strategies are employed to create and sustain the social relationships and thus an environment in which many participants are reluctant to engage in conversation. The discussion throughout the analysis illustrates how and where the status increasing strategies are woven into the discourse which supports an asymmetrical status relationship. The decreasing strategies used by the trainer do not seem to be enough to counter the effect of the status increasing moves, and the strategies used to create the high social status difference seems to negatively affect the tutors' levels of involvement.

In this piece of discourse, John, as explained in his interview, had the goal of promoting the idea that tutors should schedule regular meetings with their tutees. This is something that the tutors in the video clip did not do. There are various strategies John employs to direct the tutors' attention to this aspect of the video skit. He employees mostly marked invitations for negative evaluations of the video. When positive evaluations are given, his responses are minimal and/or status increasing and he offers more marked invitations until he finally gets the negative evaluation he is looking for. This is an example of how the cues (from the trainer) in the interaction do not match his goal (as expressed in the interview). His cues suggest that he intends to engage in a conversation, but he structures the interaction. In other words, as in medical interviews, John gives the impression he wishes to involve the tutors, but what they contribute really has little effect on the outcome (Maynard 1991).

This conversation began with John initiating the topic of discussing the good and bad aspects of the tutoring skit. He asks for feedback three times, one is an unmarked invitation and two are marked.

(12)
a. John: okay so um what did you see in that that you thought was good or not
b. so good? I mean if you were the person there would you have done some of
c. those things?
d. Jodi: this was their first meeting?
e. John: yeah (..) and maybe you might even have a beef with what they were
f. talking about at the first meeting

In line (a) John offers an unmarked invitation for the tutors' perspectives of what they thought about the video skit. He follows this with a more marked invitation in lines (b-c) that suggests a negative evaluation of some things on the video. Jodi replies in line (d) with a question about the set up of the skit and John includes this in his second marked invitation (lines e-f) in the interaction. The inclusion of some of the words used by Jodi suggests that they are collaborating in the discourse.

Kara responds to Johns request for feedback with a positive evaluation of the tutor in the video. She offers several supporting points to her position.

> g. Kara: well I think she's very resourceful um (.) you know even things she
> h. couldn't do she told you know the tutee where she could go to get them
> i. like the old exams exactly you know other things that he has other options
> j. and she's not limited to just tutor which is important because otherwise
> k. I've had instances where they'd just rely too much on me and then they
> l. they don't ya know they just expect me to do it but it's better ya know
> m. when they take things into their own hands

Kara (line g) offers what in this interaction is a dispreferred response. John was presuming a negative evaluation of the video skit. Kara prefaces her response with a filler (line g) and follows it with an explanation for her opinion. She highlights exactly what was said in the video to lead her to her opinion (lines h-j), restates her opinion (line j), and adds a personal narrative to support her position (line k-l).

John responds to the dispreferred response with a minimal evaluation and makes another (marked) request for participation.

> n. John: good (.) any thoughts on that? things specifically she said that you thought
> o. oh I definitely won't be bringing that up? (..) no?

John evaluates Kara's response as 'good' (line n) but does not elaborate or expand on any of her ideas, as will be seen later with comments he positively evaluates. He then opens up the discussion to the entire group with an unmarked invitation for input on what Kara said (line n). Before anyone takes a turn, however, he tables a marked invitation for negative evaluation (line o). In this move, he also shifts footing away from principle, placing the tutors in that role. Thus, while he is sustaining control of the topic of conversation, a status increasing strategy, he is employing a status decreasing move.

Like Kara, Steve offers a positive evaluation of the video. Since John is indicating a preference for a negative evaluation, John also treats Steve's response as dispreferred.

> p. Steve: um she made it pretty evident in the beginning like what she like her
> q. boundaries /?/ with her exams.
> r. John: so she she laid out kind of the ground rules /?/ about doing things

Steve in line (p-q) offers the second dispreferred response in this interaction with another positive evaluation of the video clip. Like Kara, he prefaces the response with a filler and gives a specific from the video to support his

opinion. Tim replies with a reformation of Steve's contribution using more professional language "ground rules," but does not elaborate (line r).

Erica then offers a preferred response of a negative evaluation of the video (lines s-t). Her criticism is in the form of advice. Tim evaluates this contribution, like Kara's, as "good," but here he builds on it (lines u-cc).

s. Erica: she was talking about /?/ she could've they could've set up a weekly thing
t. you know like a scheduled time or something
u. John: good (.) um uh that's something by the way that we really encourage you
v. ways to do and I have seen this work in the past if you tell your tutees hey
w. give me a call next time you need help that's a that's a really bad approach
x. because lots of times you won't be hearing from them until right before
y. the exam and /?/ important so it's probably a good idea to sit down with
z. them and say you know when can we meet and (.) kind of set up a weekly
aa. meeting time so they are kind of locked into that and if and if they need to
bb. change it the onus is on them to call you and let you know so that's my
cc. advice

Within the rather lengthy elaboration, John employs a couple status decreasing strategies, specifically footing shifts. In line (y) he uses the pronoun "we" to place the blame for the scheduling suggestion on a larger body than himself, the tutoring center. In the following line (v) he endorses the idea with his own experience but does not remove any of the responsibility from the tutoring center. In lines (v-w) he offers a hypothetical quote of what the tutors might say. The register he chooses to use for the utterances is one he seems to suppose the tutors would use. This, therefore, may be considered an equalizing strategy. The same, however, cannot be said for (z) where John suggests what they ought to say to their students. The use of the pronoun "we" refers here to the tutor and the tutee. He is speaking on behalf of the (good) tutors.

Notably, these status decreasing strategies are used at the end of the interaction. Prior to this turn, John has virtually complete control over the conversation. He initiates a topic and keeps the other participants on that topic throughout. By not elaborating on the positive evaluations and tabling marked invitations to participate, John manipulates the outcome of the conversation to the points he wants to make to the new tutors.

Conclusion

What the findings suggest is that tutors may not be involved in the training sessions because of an overt asymmetrical social relationship between the trainer and the tutors which tends to be limiting the tutors' participation in the training. The asymmetrical relationship is accomplished through a number of discourse strategies which raise the trainer's status in the interaction. While he does employ various strategies to reduce his status in the interaction and thus involve the tutors, these are not enough to counter the effects of the status increasing moves.

The strategies employed in the interactions function both to position the participants and to indicate how the participants should react to the contributions of others. As Gumperz (1982) stresses, participants need cues and to be able to interpret those cues to understand what is going on at any given time in an interaction. One of the problems in the tutor training sessions is that the cues given by John misleadingly indicate an interest in engaging in conversation with the tutors. He wants interaction, but as he expressed in his interview, he wants it to be within his boundaries. One of the cues in question is a marked or unmarked invitation to speak. This is the first part of perspective display series, which, in everyday conversation, functions as an involvement strategy. As in other institutional settings, such as the medical interview, John carefully controls the outcome, making the conversation lack the natural or informal feel that, according to his interviews, he would like to see in the sessions (Maynard 1991).

John explicitly states in his interview that one of his goals in the training sessions is to engage the new tutors in dialogue with him and with each other. He explains that the job that the undergraduates have been hired for is an interactive one and that it is important for them to be comfortable with that requirement of the position. The training session, according to John, is an important place for them to start becoming comfortable. One of the problems John runs into, however, is that there is a lot of information he is required to impart during the short two-hour session. If he encourages too much talk among the trainees, he will not have the opportunity or time to cover all the material they need as new employees.

The tension between these two goals of the trainer for the training sessions seems to parallel the tension between the status increasing and status decreasing strategies employed in the interactions. The status decreasing strategies encourage rapport building and the more relaxed environment in which the tutors can display their readiness for their interactive jobs. The status increasing strategies construct a hierarchy in which John discourages free talk and controls the flow and outcome of the talk. John is then in a better position to ensure all of the information that the tutoring center wants the new tutors to have is covered.

Implications

The implications for this research seem to be for the tutoring center and workplace educators in general. The findings of this research will be presented to the trainer (again) and to the administrators at the tutoring center. Using this information on involvement and distancing strategies, perhaps the center can reevaluate the structure of the session as well as the presentation of the material. If the center decides that they do want to encourage more informal conversation in the sessions, one possible suggestion would be for the trainer to work to employ more of the status decreasing strategies throughout the interaction and, in following, avoid strategies which may function as status increasing. Another suggestion may be to hold two separate training sessions, one to present all of the information and the other to discuss tutoring practices.

A second implication for this study is to add to the literature on status, power,

and language. In order to more fully understand how power and status structures work in our society, we need to be able to recognize how it is expressed and perpetuated in our daily interactions. As Maynard (1991) points out, "by first exploring the interactional basis of institutional discourse, it may be possible to better explicate just how power and authority are manifested within it" (1991:458). By focusing on the training sessions for new tutors and the developed asymmetrical social relationships between the trainer and the tutors, this paper has illustrated the power of discourse in interpersonal communication to perpetuate hierarchical social structures.

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Appendix A

Transcript Conventions

:	(after vowel) elongated sound
?	rising intonation
(.)	a pause of 1/2 second or less
(..)	a pause of 1/2 to 1 second
(...)	a pause of 1 to 1 1/2 seconds
/?/	unclear utterance
/word/	unsure transcription